



# E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

**Program for the Advancement of  
Research on Conflict and Collaboration**

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR THE CITY OF SEATTLE'S LANGSTON HUGHES PERFORMING ARTS INSTITUTE**

### **EPILOGUE**

#### **Randy Changes Course**

After two committee meetings, Randy changed plans for how he was conducting the process, because the group had been at a stalemate and the path forward remained dubious if he chose to keep everything the same. Heeding suggestions from his co-chairs, he brought in an outside facilitator to facilitate the rest of the meetings, shifted roles for his leadership team and the co-chairs, and consciously stopped being active in the committee deliberations. He also set up debrief and planning meetings so that he and his leadership team could air their concerns outside of the committee meetings, rather than take space away from committee members. And finally, he requested that the committee take the full six meetings to come up with their proposal.

#### **Neutral Facilitator**

Randy made changes immediately following the second LHPAI meeting. After the second meeting, the co-chairs told Randy that some committee members felt that City staff were driving too much of the process. Randy realized that he was the face of the City government, which "made it really hard and really confusing for people to know if I was driving or facilitating the conversation." So he called his outside facilitator, Dr. Stephen Page, and asked him to join the committee for the upcoming meeting, one meeting earlier than Stephen had planned to join. Stephen, a professor at the Evans School of Public Policy and Governance at the University

This case was written by Alexandra Wakeman Rouse, with the advisement of Stephen Page, of the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Washington. It was the winning case in E-PARCC's 2015-2016 Competition for Collaborative Public Management, Governance, and Problem-Solving Teaching Materials. The case is intended for classroom discussion and not to suggest either effective or ineffective responses to the situation depicted. It may be copied as many times as needed, provided that the authors and E-PARCC are given full credit. E-PARCC is a project of the Collaborative Governance Initiative, Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration- a research, teaching and practice center within Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. [https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/parcc\\_eparcc.aspx](https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/parcc_eparcc.aspx)

of Washington, a premiere university in the Seattle region, was perceived as a neutral third party to the LHPAI situation. As co-chair Terri Hiroshima remembered, the process needed someone from the outside to help the committee work together better. “Things were still polarized, rough and raw,” she said. “We hadn’t built trust with each other yet. Trying to work through issues that are related to race heightens everything by a thousand percent.” Stephen brought different facilitation skills to help the committee work move along. He held both big and small group discussions, sometimes intentionally separating City staff members from other committee members. He also brought flip chart paper so he could display ideas and suggestions that the small and large groups produced. Finally, he brought three graduate student volunteers from the University to take notes and help facilitate small group discussions.

### **Shifting Roles**

Committee members asked for information that Randy had not anticipated needing and some were resistant to the very idea that the city should change anything in its relationship with LHPAI. To address these two issues, rather than lengthen committee meetings or schedule more of them, he shifted some of the work offline and set up debriefs and planning meetings with his leadership team and the co-chairs to figure out how to address concerns. He wanted to make sure committee members had enough information to make informed decisions and felt empowered in their role, but had to convey the urgency of meeting the deliverables of the SLI and the September 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. The leadership team then began tasking city advisors to perform outside research for the committee, and eventually asked Stephen to also work on producing documents for the committee. They also asked Stephen to join the debrief and planning meetings, and through these discussions, Stephen began checking in with committee members between meetings to gauge members’ perceptions of the process and feelings about the topics discussed.

Randy also decided to shift the leadership structure within the committee. Randy had envisioned that Terri and Dorothy would drive more of the process of planning meeting agendas and steering the process. “At a certain point, it became more functional for staff do that,” Randy said, “[The co-chairs] can’t know all the nuances and politics at play. We hoped they would be more like partners, but the process was more complicated than we thought it would be.” Co-Chair Terri Hiroshima welcomed this shift, because she discovered that just navigating the day-to-day needs of committee members took a lot of time. Because of this, she and Dorothy could not steer the process in the way that Randy had envisioned.

### **A New Future for the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute**

At the beginning of the Action Committee process, Randy had intended that the committee would produce a report recommending a new organizational model, a fundraising structure,

clear steps on how to manage the facility, an outline of new revenue sources, and a defined level of funding from the city. In the end, the committee was able to move past the tough conversations to come to consensus on some issues, but was unable to produce recommendations for each of these goals in their final proposal. Randy and his leadership team filled those gaps, but also tweaked the committee's recommendations before presenting the final proposal to the City Council.

### **Action Committee Process and Recommendations**

Stephen's outside facilitation and extra work offline helped the committee come to consensus in deciding what organizational model would best suit LHPAI. During the fourth meeting, Stephen presented the committee with a set of case studies that his volunteer graduate students produced. These case studies showcased different organizational models of the handful of Seattle arts non-profits that had once been under the Parks repertoire before being cut by the City in the early 1980s. The familiarity of the arts organizations profiled in the case studies brought a sense of momentum, and the group decided that an organizational model that separated governance from fundraising, like a typical non-profit staff and fundraising board, would be their recommendation.

The process of deciding a new organizational model, and addressing disputes about LHPAI's mission and programming, took so long that the committee never addressed specificities regarding city funding or plans for new revenue sources. A committee member later stated that she felt that nobody wanted to determine an amount of city funding because of the implications on LHPAI staffing. "I didn't feel like people wanted to touch that," she said, "and I felt that City staff steered the conversation away from that topic." Randy decided to not push the committee to come up with recommendations that they were not ready for. Stephen explained how this played out:

*"In [the fourth and fifth] meetings, I actually posed the question to the committee about funding levels and essentially no one wanted to take it. In the final meeting, there were a couple of members of the Action Committee that wanted to dictate or recommend hard budget levels for LHPAI. I was not inclined to have that discussion in the Action Committee and instead kicked it down the road by handing it over to the transition committee, and instead we recommended implicit funding levels in the transition timeline."*

Reaching consensus on the transition timeline took a lot of the committee's time. The last three meetings focused on the details and timing of when LHPAI would stop receiving funds from OAC, and with each iteration, Randy and the leadership team made changes so that the transition took longer than the committee had recommended during their full group meetings.

“There was a little bit of incredulousness that the transition would take so long,” said a non-profit arts member. “Why would the city hold on so long? If you’re trying to be more efficient, it seems like three years is a long time.” Other members felt that the making a longer transition time was a political decision regarding Royal. An Arts Commissioner explained, “Here is an African-American, physically handicapped, older woman as a leader and this plan moves her out of this position. Politically, that will take a long time, but under the umbrella of changing the leadership structure and personnel, that transition needs to happen.”

In the end, the Action Committee produced a four-page report outlining that LHPAI should transition to become an independent non-profit arts organization over a three-year timeline. The committee recommended that during those three years, OAC should hire an outside transition consultant to build an LHPAI governing board, design and implement a new organizational, fundraising and programming strategy, and hire an Executive Director. The committee proposed that at the end of these three years, the new LHPAI non-profit would be fully financially responsible for staffing, programming and building operations.

### **OAC Final Recommendations**

Randy and his leadership team took the committee’s recommendations and considered them within the context of municipal responsibility and constraints. Randy felt that his responsibility was not about changing LHPAI, but about helping it change itself. “There is a difference between how you resource [LHPAI] and how you change it,” he said. “And you have to support it to take it to safe passage.” Eventually, after the committee presented their report to Randy, he and the leadership team pushed back LHPAI’s transition timeline by one year and did not recommend that LHPAI should be fully financially sustaining after the four-year transition time. The specific funding levels that OAC added to the proposal stated that in four years OAC would continue to fund 50% of LHPAI’s budget ,and at the end of five years OAC would determine whether it should continue rental and building operations or transfer management to the newly formed LHPAI non-profit and its board. Randy reflected on the changes,

*“We recognized that [the transition] would take longer than national research told us. We’ve had this conversation too long to rip the Band-Aid off. The worse thing we could do it cut the timeline short and have [LHPAI] fail.”*

LHPAI staff responded positively to the proposal as well. Royal remarked,

*“I’m pleased with the level of support the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute has received from the city over the last year. The ability to expand our financial capacity has intriguing possibilities. Flexing our artistic wings to further support the LHPAI mission in*

*ways that could not happen within the city structure is exciting and the possibilities are enlivening.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Reflections on the Action Committee Process and Outcome**

Overall, committee members shared positive feelings about the Action Committee process. Many spoke highly of Randy’s leadership skills and his willingness to tackle such a difficult and significant issue that the City appeared to have avoided over many years. A city staff member expressed, “The right person was in authority to make this happen. Having Randy in the position is why [this process] worked.” A community member reflected that, “Randy was a convener. His actions said, ‘This is your table, city elders and leaders. Guide me.’” A municipal employee felt that Randy’s choice to bring in a diversity of voices helped the group feel like the process carried legitimacy. “We knew it might be uncomfortable at times, but the only way to get through to a solution is for people to be able to voice concerns and support, and create ideas.”

Some folks who were wary to join the committee felt that Randy’s decision to invite an outside facilitator “saved” the process. “Initially, I was concerned that this might be a faux-process,” said a city employee, explaining that he worried that the City was just checking off a box. He said that bringing in Stephen to lead the conversations during the last four meetings was “borderline brilliant” because it “freed up people to say what was on their mind and to challenge the data or perspectives.” Another committee member said that not having a third-party facilitator “made for a stuttering beginning. The conversation might have been stuck with ‘Why are we all here?’”

While most members were grateful to be heard and supported the final OAC plan, some felt disappointed with the changes that Randy and his leadership team made to the committee’s proposal. “The proposal just went away, and what was left was what [Randy] had envisioned from the beginning,” said an arts professional. “If I’m being really cynical, everything he said was just lip service, because our proposal was totally overlooked.” They felt that OAC’s final proposal included remarkable differences that would lead to outcomes inconsistent with their proposal. One member said that he got the impression that Randy’s decision to extend the timeline another year was so that LHPAI staff could ‘run out the clock’ on their municipal careers and thus receive a bigger city pension.

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<sup>1</sup> Childers, Calandra. “Future Chartered for Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute.” Blog Post. Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute. 16 December 2013. Accessed 16 March 2015. <http://www.langstoninstitute.org/future-charted-for-langston-hughes-performing-arts-institute/>

A member of the Arts Commission expressed similar conflicting feelings about the end result of the committee process, stating:

*“Sometimes I felt like it was a dubious process. I felt like we really had to listen to these people because we asked them to be here. [But] I can look at it from the other end and say that it was just as important to get these stakeholders convened and speak to their value of the process, and share their perspectives.”*